

VZCZCXRO3865
OO RUEHBI
DE RUEHLM #0519/01 1321134
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 121134Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO ZDK RUEHTH #7380 1331453
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9960
INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1175
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 0251
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3821
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1655
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8657
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6892
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4963
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3021
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4924
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4030
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9283
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6590
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1131
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3511
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000519

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREF MOPS PHUM PGOV PREL ASEC CE
SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 70

REF: A) Colombo 514 B) Colombo 507 C) Colombo 501 D) Colombo 492 E)
Colombo 484 F) Colombo 477 G) Colombo 470 H) Colombo 469 I) Colombo
464 J) Colombo 459 K) Colombo 456 and previous

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Army is now advancing on LTTE positions from the south as well as the north of the conflict zone. Post received reports of continued shelling and heavy fire in the conflict zone through the morning of May 12. Senior Government officials continued to refute reports of any recent shelling by Government forces, blaming the LTTE for all civilian deaths. The ICRC made a renewed attempt to deliver food and evacuate wounded civilians, but was forced to turn back by active fighting at the landing point.
END SUMMARY.

ARMY ADVANCES TOWARD NEW SAFE ZONE

12. (SBU) A Sri Lankan Army contact reports that 59 Division moved north last night, May 11, and captured 400 meters of the LTTE's southern ditch-cum-bund. 53 and 58 Divisions advanced south about 250-300 meters. Elements of 58 Division have reportedly entered the new civilian safe zone. This Army contact reported that approximately 600 civilians escaped during daylight yesterday, May 11, but only 14-15 overnight. A Navy contact reported that Sea Tiger patrols managed to stop some of the civilians attempting to escape

by boat. However, about 100 civilians successfully escaped by sea. The Navy estimates Sea Tiger strength at no more than 300 cadres. Since most Sea Tigers are fighting on land, this contact reports that it is difficult to estimate LTTE casualties accurately.

¶3. (SBU) An Air Force contact said LTTE claims of as many as 3,200 civilian casualties is an exaggeration. While the SLAF did not provide its own assessment, the contact said it was much less.

"CHAOTIC" SITUATION

¶4. (SBU) A UN source with contacts within the conflict zone reports that the situation there has become "chaotic." The contacts report that the push by the Sri Lankan Army begun on May 10 has continued essentially uninterrupted. These sources indicate the full gamut of heavy weaponry was used, and that the smaller "safe zone" unilaterally declared by the GSL continued to come under attack through the morning of May 12. According to this information, the main Sri Lankan Army positions in the north of the conflict zone are currently 1-2 kilometers from the edge of the newly declared "safe zone." The Embassy source indicates the medical point is now receiving small arms fire, making work for the staff increasingly problematic. The medical point and staff reportedly can not move any further south due to the congestion around Mullivaikal East. Our UN contact reports that the number of casualties from ongoing hostilities is difficult to calculate. According to a Government doctor in the "safe zone," 378 bodies were brought to the medical point by the afternoon of May 10 and a total of 480 by the afternoon of May 11. However, according to our contact, based on the ratios documented since Jan 20th, only a fraction of the dead are brought to the medical facilities.

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¶5. (SBU) UN Acting Resident Coordinator (protect) told Charge that the number of killed a 48 hour period on May 9-10 was likely about 300-400. Government sources listed casualties at 100-200 without distinguishing between LTTE cadres and non-combatants. Contacts in the conflict zone report that the makeshift hospital was shelled once more at 7.30 am on May 12, killing 45, including the medical administrative officer, and injuring more than 80.

GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO DENY SHELLING

¶6. (SBU) In addition to his comments to Charge denying that Government forces shelled the conflict zone on May 9 and 10 (Ref A), Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe held a press conference on May 11 in which he denied that Government forces have been shelling. "We are a responsible government and we do not kill our citizens and do not use heavy weapons or aerial bombardment on areas where civilians were being held hostage by the LTTE." Similarly, Defense Ministry Spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara insisted the army has not shelled in the conflict zone, insisting that the LTTE was pinning the blame on the Government for civilians the LTTE had gunned down during escape attempts. Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa also refuted the accusations, claiming the LTTE shot mortar fire at fleeing civilians. The Government-owned paper Daily News printed intercepts of LTTE communications it ascribed to LTTE commanders, including orders to stop fleeing civilians: "Try to stop as much as you can till I send reinforcements."

ICRC FERRY UPDATE

¶7. (SBU) On May 11, the ICRC ferry "Green Ocean" transported 27 MT of food into the conflict zone. On May 12, an ICRC ferry carrying 25 MT of food (no medical supplies) arrived and anchored offshore, but did not receive clearance from either side to upload injured patients, and was forced to return to Pulmoddai. Reportedly there were no medical supplies on board. ICRC head of delegation (strictly protect) Castella told Charge he would attempt to contact senior GSL officials to secure guarantees for a renewed attempt on May 13. Charge offered to help by calling GSL officials, if needed.

UN SPOKESMAN COMMENTS QUESTIONED

¶ 18. (SBU) The nationalist daily "The Island" reported that Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe confirmed that UN spokesman in Colombo Gordon Weiss would be summoned to the Foreign Ministry to explain his May 10 comments to the Associated Press about an ongoing "bloodbath" in the conflict zone. Samarasinghe reportedly said, "It is not the first time the Weiss has gone beyond his mandate and made adverse remarks about the internal strife in the country. We have every right to deal with him."

MOORE